ARAM 3:1&2 (1991) 293-318

THE LIFE OF OUR HOLY FATHER ALEXANDER

TRANSLATED FROM GREEK BY ELIZABETH THEOKRITOFF

1. INTRODUCTION[1]

The Manuscript and its Author(s)

The *Life of Alexander* which is translated in this volume is the one published by E. de Stoop in the *Patrologia Orientalis* VI, Fasc. 5, 658-701. The *Life*, preserved in a single manuscript, *Parisinus* gr. 1452 of the 10th/11th century, seems to be from the sixth century, but some parts appear to have been written before the end of the fifth century. The major problem is that the manuscript is not a homogeneous work: it was written by two different authors. The first author, who seems to have been a direct disciple of Alexander Akoimetos, aimed to write a work solely centred on the life of his master. The second one manipulated the original work and added the life of Rabbula, which occupies almost the third of the manuscript, in order to give more importance to the famous bishop of Edessa, and to add some glorious deeds to the *Life of Alexander*.[2] One question remains unanswered: was Rabbula truly a disciple of Alexander Akoimetos, or did the later compiler of the *Life of Alexander* simply make him so? Despite having another source for the life of the Bishop of Edessa in Syriac,[3] one cannot reject the possibility that Rabbula could have met Alexander and accepted from him, not only baptism, but also instructions for an ascetic Christian life. However, the whole question is still shrouded in darkness because of the lack of sufficient historical evidence.

The Akoimetoi and their unceasing hymnody

The monks who followed in the steps of Alexander were called *akoimetoi* or the "sleepless monks", for, like angels in heaven, they did not sleep but praised the Lord day and night. Their unceasing hymnody was a unique feature of their ascetic life, for it was their own invention. The main reason which led Alexander to such hymnody was that he was not content to pray

[1]The introduction is by Dr Shafiq AbouZayd.

[2]For a detailed study of this problem see Vööbus, A., "La vie d'Alexandre en grec - un témoin d'une biographie inconnue de Rabbula écrite en syriaque", *Contributions of Baltic University*, 62 (Pinneberg, 1948).

[3]Cf. Blum, G. G., *Rabbula von Edessa, der Christ, der Theolog*, (CSCO 300 = Subs. 34, 1969).

only according to the routine which was decreed by the early Syrian Church in the *Didascalia*:

> "Perform prayer in the morning and at the third hour, and at the sixth hour, and at the ninth hour, and in the evening, and when you go to sleep, and at compline, and at the cock crow."[4]

He wanted rather to extend this practice to an unceasing hymnody day and night, but he could not find any help from the Bible to impose this rule on his disciples. First of all, he found that man should praise God day and night for His marvellous creation of this universe, and as a result, he divided his community into fourteen choirs. There were seven for the day and seven for the night, for seven was mentioned in the Bible as the basic number of hymnody to praise God: "Seven times a day I have praised Thee."[5]

But this was not enough for Alexander, who was seeking unceasing hymnody. Because God had created twenty-four hours, the night and the day he then ordered the fourteen choirs of his community to sing for twenty-four hours in turn for God. Alexander imposed this rule of unceasing hymnody on his community in order to resemble the angels who glorify God day and night unceasingly.[6] This monastic coenobitic unceasing hymnody, as it is described in the *Life of Alexander*, is unique in the history of early Christian monasticism. It deserves special attention for it describes on the one hand the individualistic character of Syrian asceticism which enjoyed a great deal of freedom and independence, and on the other hand the various eremitic schools and different ascetic ways of life, some of which portray unique features of early Syrian monasticism.

The Bible and the monastic life

The Bible was the main book of the *akoimetoi*, and Alexander never attempted to do anything before referring to the Word of God. When Alexander joined the monastic life his goal was solely to fulfil the Word of God in his lifetime. Yet, one day in his early ascetic life when he was still a member of the Abbot Elias' monastery, he was deeply tormented when his Abbot told him that no-one can fulfil the Word of God in its entirety in his own lifetime. This answer shook Alexander and drove him to leave his community and to build up freely and independently his own ascetic biblical

[4]*Didascalia*, III, 40. [The most recent edition is by Vööbus, A., *Didascalia Apostolorum*, (CSCO 401-402; 407-408; 1979)].

[5]*Ps.* 1:2.

[6]See a description of this unceasing prayer in sections 27 to 30.

ideal. In fact, Alexander remained fully loyal to his biblical ideal, for everything he did was based on the Scriptures. He even fought against civil and religious authorities because they had neglected the Word of God and followed their own will. This fact might have been behind the hostility of some bishops to Alexander's mission, especially in that people believed Alexander and yearned for his teaching.[7]

Preaching and recluse life.

Alexander spent his life as both a recluse and a preacher, for he read the Gospels and found that a disciple of Jesus Christ should preach the Scriptures throughout his life. Thus, Alexander pointed out clearly throughout his life that his recluse vocation was not intended to keep him silent and isolated from people like some Syrian hermits, but was instead in preparation for preaching the Word of God among the people. As a result he never spent long without going out to preach the Scriptures. Furthermore, being influenced by his Lord Jesus Christ who travelled from town to town to preach the Kingdom of God, Alexander travelled all around the Syrian Orient, even reaching Constantinople, to preach the Bible to everybody. He was a restless man for both prayer and preaching, and like his Lord, he never had a stable place to live in for long. The author of the *Life of Alexander* reports that one day Alexander decided to set off for a new preaching mission and on his way he arrived at a place called 'the Krithinion', where he found a monastery obeying the same rules of life as his community. In fact, that monastery was one of his, but because of his continual travelling and preaching Alexander had forgotten some of his previous monastic foundations ,which seem to have been numerous in the Syrian Orient.[8] However, this fact confirms that the recluse life was not the goal of Alexander's vocation, for he did not concentrate his mind on leading his monastic communities and organising their ascetic life but was busy with his mission of preaching, which can be proclaimed through the ascetic life but not solely confined to it.

Poverty and God's providence.

Another main feature of the *Life of Alexander* is poverty, which was

[7]It is reported that Alexander was rejected by some bishops, who accused him of heresy. This claim cannot easily be justified, for there is no evidence in Alexander's teaching of any heresy. The hostility might have occurred out of jealousy because the fame of Alexander has certainly eclipsed the reputation of some other bishops and priests. On the heresy of Alexander, cf. de Stoop, *Patrologia Orientalis* VI, 649-652.

[8]See below, section 42.

understood to be a complete rejection of any material wealth and the refusal to perform any manual work to feed the body. Alexander believed that a Christian should completely trust the words of Jesus which remind everyone to be free from the cares of food and clothes, because God provides daily for His creatures.[9] Indeed, Alexander never allowed his disciples to store food for the future, but made them beg their daily food like all poor and destitute people. He also taught them to have a strong faith in God, for His providence never neglects its servants on earth. This belief of his was accompanied by many miracles, for several times Alexander miraculously found food for his community.[10] Alexander's life of poverty was decreed by the Gospels, and therefore Alexander struggled throughout his life to be a Christian according to the words of his Master, Jesus Christ.

Alexander Akoimetos rediscovered.

Alexander Akoimetos and his sleepless monks have been neglected throughout history, and it is time to rediscover the spiritual richness of this Syrian ascetic treasure. His life of biblical ideals, the unceasing prayer, the preaching and the life of a recluse, belief in the providence of God, the poverty: all these major aspects of his life were part of the basis of early Syrian eremitism and they still remain so for any Syrian ascetic renewal in our own time. As his life is very similar to the life of St Francis of Assisi in many respects, Alexander is a Christian spiritual model for both East and West.[11]

2. TRANSLATION

PART I

1. The most holy and blessed Alexander, a man who attained apostolic stature, is the subject of my discourse with you, lovers of Christ. I consider that it takes the same strength to achieve virtue in action and to tell of good deeds worthily in words. But with the help of God who loves mankind, I shall relate where this holy man came from, and the source of his mode of spiritual struggle - if it is incumbent upon those who have received benefits from God, who loves mankind, to acknowledge His compassion and rejoice

[9]Cf. *Mt.* 6, 25-34.

[10]See below, sections 19, 33, 45 and 47.

[11]For more information about the *Akoimetoi*, cf. Marin, E., "Acémètes", *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* 1, (1903), 304-308; Pargoire, J., "Acémètes", *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* 1, (1907), 307-321; Vailhé, S., "Acémètes", *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques* 1, (1901), 274-282. See also *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, I (1991), 46, 59; *Encylopaedia of the Early Church*, I (1992), 22.

in His works and glorify Him with the apostle, saying, 'O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements and how inscrutable His ways!'(*Rom.* 11:33).

2. Let us consider, then, the outcome of this man who passed among us, following an uninterrupted course like the sun's in order to proclaim the Judge of the contest and Sun of righteousness. Let us take up the armour through which he defeated the whole panoply of the enemy. And not only did he put to flight the principalities and powers and world rulers of this present darkness and the spiritual hosts of wickedness through this same armour, but he also held at bay the whole world when it strove against him. For the enemy constantly attacked him but was always routed by the power of God; and being unable to achieve anything, he summoned all humanity as his allies, and they attacked the brave spiritual athlete in a variety of ways.

3. The blessed one feared neither royal authority, nor the threat of rulers, nor the reproach of the people, nor the wicked exhortations of bishops. Nor was any other pretext able to draw him away from the truth, but he put all his detractors to shame by his upright life and complete faith. For he was always heedful of the words of the apostle, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword?' (*Rom.* 8:35), and abode by them in his actions.

4. He was the only man who shone forth in this wicked generation of ours - our Master bears witness that it is a wicked generation - obtaining for himself a double crown. But all the writers of history have kept silent because words were too weak to tell of him, and this silence has been fruitless for those who would imitate him. This is why we, like merchants in the world who risk death for the sake of transient gain - this is why we, for the benefit of those who wish to imitate him, prefer to be called rash and, finding the occasion, shall tell his story in part. For it is impossible for man to recount the virtues of the brave athlete as they deserve. Anyway, let us begin our task, and show the brave athlete adorned with faith. Alexander, of blessed memory, loved the Master with all his heart and all his strength, and manifested it in his actions. That he neglected nothing of the commandments is shown by the fruit he bore. For the Lord says, 'By their fruits you shall know them' (*Mt.* 7:16). Nor was he concerned for his own salvation only, but he yearned to bring the whole world also to Christ the Master. This he did to some extent. And as if he held in his hands the reward of those who were saved through him, for fifty years he laboured with resolute soul and unflinching heart for those who wished to be saved, and especially for

his own salvation.

5. This blessed man came from Asia, of distinguished parents, and lived on the islands. He received all his grammatical education in Constantinople. He grew to adulthood in sobriety and prudence, and served as an *eparkhikos* (prefect's guard). In a short time he came to see that the things of this life were rotten and unsound, and that 'like the flower of the grass their glory passes away' (*Jas.* 1:10). He despised the things of this life as transient, and made the comparison with the better life. As he carefully studied the Old and New Testaments, he found in the holy Gospels a treasure inviolable and unfailing for those who come in faith to Him who says, 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me' (*Mt.* 19:21).

6. Hearing this and sincerely believing it, without delay Alexander gave to the poor and needy his share of the wealth he had inherited and the things he had acquired during his military service - which were many, since he had been a prudent and brave *eparkhikos*. His desire was to be alienated from his country and friends and family for the sake of the hope that lay before him, and draw near to Christ the Master alone. He heard that in Syria, there were coenobitic communities in those parts which pursued that way of life with excellence. Nobly he made his way to them and asked [admittance], and entered into the monastery of the archimandrite Elias, most beloved of God, well known in those parts for the brotherly love, order and rules of his community.

7. In the four years he spent there Alexander made progress in the Lord, fighting the good fight and being obedient in all things. He paid precise attention to whether this life was in accordance with the divine Scriptures. He found that it was not because, as those who study such things know, coenobitic monasteries do not have the evangelical freedom from possessions and cares, since the abbot is concerned with looking after all the needs of the brothers. But the servant of God Alexander, fervent in spirit and constantly hearing the Master's words 'take no thought for the morrow' and 'you are of more value than many sparrows', was perturbed and could no longer contain himself. He was not able to go into verbal battle from the first, because the time was not right; he first waited to acquire the spiritual armour which is the psalter.

8. In four years he fulfilled this desire of his: he took time in the discipline of learning not because he was slow to learn, but in order to understand exactly what each verse was about. When after prayer and supplication he had been vouchsafed this knowledge, he could no longer bear to look upon anything corrupt, in contravention of the commandment; but he suddenly

took the holy Gospel, went to the abbot and asked, 'Father, is what is written in the Gospel true?' Elias, a true father and pastor of reason-endowed sheep, heard the enormity of the question and thought that the brother had been led astray by the evil one and lost his faith. He said nothing to the brother immediately, but fell on his face and beseeched the brothers to pray for this man who had been ensnared, so he said, by the devil. Two hours passed while all wept and prayed for him, and then the abbot stood up and said to Alexander, 'Brother, how has it come to you to think such things?' But he insisted, saying, 'Is what is in the holy Gospel true?' Hearing from everyone that it was true because these were the words of God, he rejoined, 'Then why do we not keep them?' They all said to him, 'Nobody can keep them'. Then, seized with an uncontrollable rage because he had lost everything over the past years and squandered [the time] in vain, he took leave of all the brothers and, taking the holy Gospel, went off to follow what was written and emulate our holy fathers. And for a while he emulated the prophet Elijah and went into the desert, and lived there for seven years, having no care for anything worldly. But he was truly guided by the Holy Spirit.

PART II

9. Once he felt himself strong in faith, Alexander undertook to preach the Gospel, lest he should be condemned along with the lazy and idle servant. Then he heard that the work of the evil one reigned in a certain city; for the people were constantly keeping festivals for their idols, and rejoicing in their nefarious deeds. Girding up his loins with the preparation of the Gospel, he went into their famous temple and, by the power of God, set fire to it and destroyed it. After performing this feat he did not leave the area, but stayed in that temple.

10. When the people returned in a great fury to do away with him, they were calmed by the man's boldness of speech and withdrew. Or rather, he was protected by the grace of God, as he cried in the words of the Apostles, 'I am also a man of like nature with you (cf. *Acts* 14:15) and have spent my time amidst these vain things. Flee from eternal condemnation. I am bringing you the Kingdom of Heaven'.

11. They kept doing these things for a long time, but were quite unable to harm the noble athlete. There was a certain citizen named Rabbula - a co-worker with the devil and a city father, distinguished as he was for his eloquence and for his wealth, who later condemned the idols and became a herald of the truth. Frenzied with idolatry, this man cried to the people in a loud voice: 'Brothers and fathers, let us not abandon our ancestral gods, but

let us perform our sacrifices as usual. The gods have no part with this Galilean. Either it is through their forbearance towards man that they have not taken revenge on him for insulting them, or the God of the Christians is great'. Trusting in his power and befuddled by all the wiles of the devil, he said to all the people, 'I will go to him alone and destroy his magic and deceit, and avenge the gods and all of us who have been wronged by him'. He went up to Alexander in a great frenzy and started to argue with him, and first he began speaking brazenly and saying: 'What demon has sent you to this city to destroy the temple of our gods and masters? - And not just the temple, but you want to carry all of us with you by your acts of magic and make us like yourself, all impious towards the gods. So tell me the truth: what hope do you Christians have that you hold your life in such contempt, daring to do things like this?' Smiling, the blessed one replied, 'We do not despise our life, as you put it; but in our longing for the eternal life, we despise the temporary one. For it is written in our Scriptures, "He who loses his soul in this world, will find it in eternal life"' (cf. *Lk.* 9:24). 'What hope do you look forward to when you are released from this life?', Rabbula asked him. 'For those who want to learn the truth and pass from darkness into the light of truth', said the blessed one, 'we demonstrate the truth of this word through our actions. We have no need of elaborate myths such as you pagans believe in'.

12. He said, 'I am ready to learn about all this madness of yours through which you have not only alarmed us, but you also never cease dishonouring our gods'. Hearing this, the blessed one said, 'Hear of the power of our God and the mysteries of our faith'. And he began to speak to him about God's compassion towards man and the power of the holy Scriptures, beginning from the creation of the world and going up to the economy of the Cross. They kept arguing back and forth all that day and the next night, remaining without food. Nor did they give themselves up to sleep; but as he pointed to written testimony of the virtues of the saints and their boldness towards their Master, going through the divinely-inspired Scriptures, he came to the prophet Elijah who three times brought down fire from heaven. When Rabbula had heard many chapters, he began to object, contending: 'All these stories of yours are lies and made-up myths. But I advise you what is to your advantage: to join in our festival and sacrifice to the gods. As for your transgressions against them, in their love for mankind they will grant you forgiveness because of your ignorance'. But the blessed one said: 'If these were gods, why did they not hear those who were supplicating them from morning till evening [and respond] with fire? The servant of God Elijah was only one man, and he slew all the false prophets by the power of God.

And when he prayed that it should not rain because of the idolatrous madness of the people, for three years and six months it did not rain upon the earth, until the Master Himself assuaged the harshness of his servant out of compassion for the widow, and persuaded him to annul his oath and to pray to Him for the world. For he had said, "As the Lord lives, there shall be no dew on the ground except by my word" (cf. *1 Kings* 17:1); and the Lord God did not go against his servant's oath, but it happened even as the prophet had said'.

13. Laughing, Rabbula said to the blessed Alexander: 'If this is true and that is what your God is like, and He hears His servants so quickly, you too should pray for fire to come down in front of us; and if it does come down, I shall say that there is no god other than the God of the Christians. For in fact the things you have in your scriptures are false, and, as you say, you are a servant of that God'. Without hesitation, the blessed Alexander trusted that the Lord God would grant the petition. And because it is written, 'to him that believes, all things are possible', he said to him, 'You call on your gods, for they are many, that fire may come down before us. Then I will call on my God and fire will come down and consume the rushes lying before us'. But Rabbula said, 'I do not have such authority'. Hearing this the saint, ardent in spirit, arose saying, 'Let us pray'. He stood facing east with his hands stretched out, and prayed so that creation itself was moved. And fire came down and consumed the rush mats lying around the house, as the noble athlete had said. It did them no harm. But Rabbula, seeing the immensity of the miracle and thinking that the fire would consume him too, fell at the blessed man's feet and clasped them until the fire had died down, and cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Great is the God of the Christians!' He wanted to proclaim the miracle to everyone, but the saint made him swear not to confess the mystery to anyone during his lifetime, and he kept his word. But thirty years after this miracle took place, when the blessed one was dead, Rabbula confessed this before bishops and monks, and the testimony of the new disciple is true. By this sign, the faithful ought to be informed that he had also destroyed the temple in this manner.

14. After seeing this miracle, Rabbula stayed with the blessed Alexander for a week, learning the word of truth in more detail. Convinced by these things, he then asked for enlightenment. When holy Easter had come and he was ready to be vouchsafed holy baptism, the enemy of truth, seeing his power being destroyed on all sides, hastened to deprive the new disciple Rabbula of eternal life, and suggested to him that he should not be baptised in the city, but should go away to a certain martyrium and be baptised there. It was three stages from the city. And he prepared for a canoness of that

martyrium to be possessed by a demon. So when they came into the martyrium, he found her in the throes of a fit. Seeing her, Rabbula at once turned back, saying, 'I am not becoming a Christian. For she is certainly being punished by the gods for becoming a Christian: and if I become one, the same will happen to me'.

15. Seeing how Rabbula had been put off, the blessed one earnestly beseeched God to destroy the device of the devil and have mercy on the new disciple. After three hours he was just able to convince him, telling him, 'This is the devil's device. This woman is being punished for her evil deeds, and because she disgraced the habit that she wears. If we go in and the demon does not admit as much through her mouth, then do not listen to me'. Hearing this, he was persuaded to go in, expecting to hear whether what the blessed man had said was true. When they entered, they found her in torment, and confessing in a loud voice the cause of her possession by the demon. Hearing of her shameful deeds and convinced that this was why she was possessed, as the blessed man had said, Rabbula said, 'Truly she is being punished for her evil deeds'. And thus with unfeigned faith he was accounted worthy of holy baptism.

16. Again, God performed many miracles through him. For when he had been baptised and come out of the font, his garment was found to be covered with crosses from head to foot. Through this sign, he was further strengthened in faith. Seeing the greatness of the change and the miracle, the citizens believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, with their wives and children. And they came to faith with such ardour that they hastened to receive the seal of holy baptism before they had even heard the word of God.

17. The blessed Alexander, wanting to discover whether they really believed, said to them all, 'If anyone has idols in his house, let him bring them into our midst and destroy them with his own hands'. And one could see the mysterious works of God on that day, because if anyone were pretending to believe and wanted to hide his idols, he could not do so. For each of them hurried to bring his own idols before he could be reproached by someone else; for they knew each other's secrets. In this way, both they and their houses were purified. And in a short time they were firmly established in faith, and were all vouchsafed the grace of holy baptism. In a short time, they and their wives and children became so zealous for their faith that they asked the authorities to exile those who disputed the truth of the faith.

18. Seeing them all rejoicing in their faith and giving thanks to God, the blessed one said to them, 'Up to now you have been partaking of milk. But if anyone wants to partake of solid food and desires to become a perfect

Christian, let him sell his possessions and give to the poor, and take no thought for the morrow, and he shall have treasure in heaven. But let him seek the Kingdom of Heaven and the righteousness of God, as it is written, and all these things will be added unto him in addition'. Some of those who had many possessions heard this, and it seemed hard to them. The disciple Rabbula said, 'Am I not yet a perfect Christian? How can I do this? Who will support all my family if I do this? This is simply false. If you want to, convince me by your works and maintain me and my children even just for one day, and then I will believe what you say. If you cannot do this in the city, what if we go out into the desert?' The blessed Alexander replied, 'Take your own children and as many others as you want, and lead them out into the desert wherever you want. And if the Lord does not take care of us, then do not listen to me'. And Rabbula replied, 'If you do this, I will follow everything that is written'.

19. Then Rabbula took his own children and others in addition as he wanted, desiring to test the blessed Alexander, and took them into the desert where man had never been before. They journeyed all day, and at about the eleventh hour they halted between two mountains. Rabbula looked round at the roads and laughed. But the blessed Alexander hastened to his prayers, as was his custom; and when they had completed the evening hymn together, the Lord acted according to the faith of the noble athlete of Christ. For Christ the Master sent His angel in the form of a peasant who had his beast laden with pure warm bread, and two cooking pots hung on either side of the animal containing vegetables and lentils. Then the blessed Alexander said to Rabbula, 'Get up, receive it, and do not be faithless but believing' (cf. *Jn.* 20:27). But he remained speechless for a long time, wondering and saying to himself, 'How did this come to appear in this desolate spot? Where could a peasant have got so many loaves, and such loaves? We travelled all day, and have only just reached this spot. Likewise he must have left at night so as to arrive at this time. So the bread cannot have been made today. But then how does it come to be warm?' And thinking all this, he marvelled at the power of Christ. He asked the man who had come, 'Where do you come from, and who sent you here?' The angel of God replied, 'My Master sent me'. So they accepted the food, and sent the supposed peasant away. And when he had gone a little way from them, he suddenly disappeared. They partook with thanksgiving of what Jesus the Master had sent, and spent the night in that place. The next day, they returned to the city.

20. Rabbula was strengthened in his faith by this sign. Desiring to be without distractions in his meditation on God, he gave the Council's property to the Council, and gave his wife's property to his wife and

daughters and maidservants. His wife consented to her husband's plan, and set up a monastery, and remained there with her daughters and maidservants, serving the Lord with her whole heart. Rabbula freed his slaves, giving them an adequate allowance. He sold his property and clothing and gave to the poor, then went into the desert and took to asceticism with such severity that he could not be accounted as one clothed in a human body, persisting in fasting and vigil and prayer, constantly making satisfaction to the Lord for his sins and grieving over his former error.

21. God who is merciful and loves mankind, who alone has no remembrance of wrong, who has said, 'Those who honour me I will honour' (*1 Sam.* 2:30), fulfilled his promise in this man, and did not long keep hidden His good servant, but revealed him as a light for the world. For when the bishop of Edessa died, the whole city and the surrounding area wanted him to be their shepherd, and he was elected leader of the people by many votes. Edessa is the metropolitan see of Mesopotamia.

22. When he was made bishop, Rabbula became a haven of knowledge of God, not only for Syria and Armenia and Persia but for the whole world. For from the start, the Lord had established schools of the Syriac language in this city. For leading citizens (that is, of the surrounding towns) and men of substance sent their children to be educated there. So when Bishop Rabbula took office, he made haste - the Holy Spirit working with him - to unite everyone in the true and certain faith, striving always to act in accordance with his teacher. And of him one can truly say, 'It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher' (*Mt.* 10:25). I shall also relate this good work which this blessed man performed, for it will be of benefit to my listeners. To widows and orphans, he became nothing less than a father. Twice a month he summoned the foreign children of pagan families from the schools, and gathered them together and taught them the word of truth. When they had received the seal of the Holy Spirit and thus enjoyed the greatest of benefits, they returned to their home countries. As time went on they acquired good habits of behaviour, and passed them on to their children even to this day. Thus the grace of God shone forth even in those parts of the world. And he did this, not for two or three years, but for thirty. Let us point out that this man's achievements and his virtues came about through the efforts of his teacher. For he struggled no less than this man. I can truthfully say that his works were such as to put him on a level with the prophet Elisha: and the new disciple among them.

23. Seeing Rabbula nobly disposed and recognising that he was capable of leading to God others, and all those who in due time would become

followers of the faith, the father of reason-endowed sheep Alexander rejoiced in his heart. He knew from these works that everything is possible to him who believes, and that our Master God is ready to give to those who ask things pleasing to Him. So he thought again what he should ask of the merciful Christ. The people were trying by every means to keep him with them because of their great love for him, so that they asked for him as their shepherd. Knowing this, he planned to leave the city secretly. Realising this, the people of the city mounted guards at the city gates and kept him under observation night and day, lest they should lose their true father. But the blessed one, unable to leave openly, was let down over the walls in a basket by his disciples at night, like the blessed Paul, and thus left the city.

PART III

24. Alexander went two days' journey into the desert and found a place inhabited by thieves, where there was a robber chief with thirty wicked men under him. There was no city or country area that escaped being defiled by the nefarious works of their hands. The blessed Alexander had heard about this from many people, and he besought God, asking Him to bring the souls of those wicked men to Him. Knowing that his intention was good, God granted him his petition. For he met the same robber chief and made known to him the word of truth. Filled with compunction by the blessed man's words and sincerely believing, he received the grace of holy baptism. After he had been vouchsafed the grace of holy baptism and come up out of the holy font, the blessed Alexander asked him, 'Did you ask for something as you came to the holy font?' 'Yes', he said. And again he asked, 'What did you ask?' The other told him, 'I asked that the Lord would soon receive my soul'. He lived for one week, repenting of his deeds, and on the eighth day the Lord took him.

25. The thirty men with him saw this strange wonder, and they too came to the blessed Alexander asking to be vouchsafed the gift of Christ. And believing sincerely in our Lord Jesus Christ, they also received holy baptism. Indeed, they took to their faith with such fervour that they made that house of thieves into a monastery and remained there serving the Lord with their whole heart, so that in a short time they were found dear in the sight of the Lord. When he saw that they were strong enough in their faith to be able to build up others, he appointed an abbot for them and strengthened them further in their faith; then he took leave of them and prayed over them, and went on his way rejoicing.

26. After travelling for two days, the spiritual Jacob reached the river Euphrates and crossed it. And finding a wine jar stuck in the ground, he

performed his prayers in the mountains during the day, and spent the nights in the wine jar. [Jacob] had crossed over with his staff, praying for bread to eat and clothing to wear (cf. *Gen.* 28:20), and spent twenty years there. With him in mind, the blessed Alexander prayed God to grant him to be accounted a second Jacob. And God, who loves mankind, granted him what he had asked of Him. Comparing the parallels, he said to himself: 'He was a shepherd of dumb sheep; I strive to become a shepherd of reason-endowed sheep. He after seven years justly asked to receive his payment from Laban; after seven years, I shall win grace from my Master. He served man for twenty years and gained four wives and became the father of the synagogues; in my twenty years of serving my Master, I have brought to Him four choirs of foreigners. He feared his brother, and redeemed his life with eight droves (cf. *Gen.* 32:11-21); and I look for my salvation with eight choirs praising God. He had twelve sons according to the flesh; I have twelve readings from the divine Scriptures'.

27. These were the things he thought of while he was living in the wine jar. Gradually, over twenty years, there gathered around him 400 men who, because of his fine and blameless life, were eager themselves to be united with Christ, convinced by him to attain the Kingdom of Heaven. They formed four linguistic groups in all: Romans, Greeks, Syrian and Copts. He established a monastery and divided them into eight choirs to sing and chant to God with zeal and understanding. He divided the order of service and the worship into twelve parts, in accordance with the prayer he had used while he was in the wine jar. Here too one may marvel at the faith of this noble athlete, in that he took no thought for any of the necessities even though he had to provide for so many brothers; they had only sufficient for the day, as the Gospel says, and gave all that was left over to the poor. They had only one tunic each, and in all this they rejoiced in the words of the Lord, nourished by the hope of things to come.

28. The servant of God Alexander paid precise attention to what was written in the divinely-inspired Scriptures, and strove that not one title of God's commandments should escape him, but that he should imitate all the great men whose works have been written of. At first he took the Apostles' order of service for his rule of spiritual conduct, and performed the third, sixth and ninth hours and one night-time office. Then again he considered what he should ask of God; and he saw that God the Master always proclaims the number seven, as He says, 'Seven times a day I have praised Thee' (*Ps.* 118:164). He desired earnestly to bring this about, which he did, and performed prayers seven times a day and seven times a night.

29. He spent seven years in this way, and again he wondered what he

should ask; and he found that the prophet says, 'And on the law of the Lord he shall meditate day and night' (*Ps.* 1:2). He considered this, saying to himself, 'How is this possible?' And again he considered and said, 'Certainly, if it were not possible, the Holy Spirit would not have given us this command through the prophet'. He wanted to ask this but did not dare, knowing that the request was superhuman. But again he knew that Christ daily encourages us by His words: 'Ask and it shall be given you, knock and it shall be opened unto you', and 'for everyone who asks receives, and to him who knocks it shall be opened', and again, 'all things are possible to him who believes'. And pondering this, he said to himself, 'If our Master in His love for mankind encourages us to ask of Him all good things, why do we, through our sloth, neglect to ask?' And he spent three years devoting himself to fasting and prayer, and beseeching God night and day to bring this about on earth through him, since it is the work of the heavenly powers. Our merciful God who loves mankind, seeing the love and earnest desire of His good servant and his fervent zeal, granted him this request also, appearing plainly to him and saying, 'Establish that which you have asked for, and it shall be established on earth unto the end of the world according to your word'. He confessed this as having happened to someone else, as the blessed Apostle Paul did when he recounted his vision under the guise of someone else's; this was what Alexander did, the Apostle's disciple.

30. Once this mystery had been revealed to him, he looked for a rule that could accomplish this work. But seeing the weakness of our nature, he found himself at a loss. He searched the whole of the Old and New Testaments and looked at all the great men born at various times, but found no one who had achieved this wondrous work on earth and whom he could imitate so as to fulfil his good intention for the salvation of many souls. So he took as his teacher the Maker of all; and as He had marked divisions in creation, so Alexander arranged his life, saying, 'My Christ revealed in creation twenty-four hours of the night and day; so let us spend the course of the day and night in twenty-four services, singing in praise of God. Our Saviour commands us to forgive our fellow-servants their sins against us unto seventy times seven; so let us make seventy-seven prostrations in respect of these as we send up our prayers to our good God. My Master caused the day and night to increase in an orderly manner; in the same kind of ordered manner, let us unceasingly bring our hymns of praise to Him. Even on earth, the angels glorified my Saviour; so let us glorify Him with the angels'. And he arranged that every office should be performed, all the readings should be preserved and all the services should take place, and in addition seventy times seven times, night and day, the hymnody of the angels, which is,

'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill among men'.

31. When he had accomplished these feats in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, he sought again what he might ask of God. He found in the Gospel that seventy were chosen from among the disciples to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ; and he prayed to God that from his disciples, the same number might be proved zealots for the faith capable of preaching the word of God to the Gentiles. God granted him this also and, in accordance with the saint's prayer, proved seventy of his disciples strong in their faith. I shall relate truthfully how this came about. When his eight companies were arrayed in perfect faith, and had long been sending up their prayers and hymns to God with joy and gladness of heart, he thought to himself, 'With all this freedom from care, laziness should never be allowed to creep in'. And again he induced in himself physical suffering, as was his habit. And he called by name 150 brave soldiers of Christ who truly possessed the breast-plate of faith and the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Holy Spirit, and said to them, 'Brothers, let us test whether we are perfect in faith, and let us go through this terrible wilderness of the unbelievers and show by our works that we believe in God with all our heart, and not in word alone'. For he wanted at first to go to Egypt and teach the unbelievers there, those who put their faith in the works of their own hands, but the Holy Spirit prevented him. His true disciples, hearing his plan, decided single-mindedly to follow him. Blessed Alexander wanted to leave that place altogether, and he did not make this known to anyone, but said, 'I am going to visit the brothers in the desert'. He installed as abbot a gentle and quiet man, a holy man of God by the name of Trofimos. And when he had exhorted them all, as was his wont, he bade them farewell, said a prayer and left.

32. Crossing the river Euphrates once again, the blessed Alexander and the disciples he had chosen went into the Persian desert, taking no necessities except the parchments on which they had the Holy Scriptures. They spent their time in the wilderness with only one tunic, and night and day they performed their uninterrupted rule of hymnody. It happened at that time, in order that they should be shown more excellent, that they were tempted by the needs of the flesh. For many days they had nothing but nuts to eat, and had to content themselves with these. Thirty of them murmured against the blessed one, and said to him, as [the Israelites] had said to Moses, 'Have you led us into this desert to starve us to death?'; and they wanted secretly to return to the monastery. They were thinking to themselves of this plan; but the blessed one knew their intention in the Spirit. For nothing escaped him since he was truly a second Moses, faithful in all his house. Calling them

together he condemned their lack of faith and reproved them, and released them to return to the monastery he had left, saying to them in a loud voice, 'Believe me, brothers, today the Lord will visit us and put to shame your lack of faith'.

33. They had gone a short way when, as the saint had said, the Lord sent Roman tribunes and soldiers, bringing them good things from God. They asked them to come to their forts and bless them. For there are forts between the Romans and the Persians against the barbarians, ten and twenty milestones apart. The brothers who had deserted saw the men coming from afar off and, realising that it was happening just as the holy father had said, were strengthened in their faith. Some of them fell on their faces and repented, and were united with the brotherhood. The others who were with him went into the inner desert and dwelt there until their deaths. And blessed Alexander, commanded by the Holy Spirit to go with them, as happened to the apostle Peter, followed them without hesitation; he went right through the border country, strengthening everyone in their faith. He supported the poor like a father, and taught the rich to do good. They were so filled with compunction by his words that they brought their claims against their debtors and burned them in front of him.

34. Certain wicked men of affluence, darkened in their minds, rose up and said to him, 'Have you come to us to impoverish us?' The blessed one cursed these men who were ungrateful for the gifts of God, and in that encampment there was no rain for three years because of them. Later, discovering the cause of God's anger, all the people came together with one accord to root out of the encampment those who were responsible. They were terrified and took refuge in the church, atoning for their sin with tears. The rest of the crowd, seeing this and fearing that the same might happen to them, went and asked the bishops of the Romans to make representations by letter on their behalf to the blessed Alexander, since they had heard that he was in Antioch. They regarded this with great concern, thinking that he had gone to Antioch to intercede with the commander against them. When the bishops heard this, they hastened to write to Alexander asking him to beseech God on behalf of the encampment, and have mercy on its inhabitants. When he received the letter and learned from it of the people's suffering, the saint wept bitterly before the Lord, saying, 'Who am I, my Lord, that you have thus heard me and abused this blameless people? I thank you, Master, that you have always heard me, sinner as I am. And now I beseech your compassion to have mercy on the poor, and restore to them also the crops for the three years of barrenness, and make known to me that I am your servant'. When he had prayed thus, believing unhesitatingly that

God would do as he asked, he sent the people away saying, 'In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ go your way, brothers'. And according to his word, in the fourth year there was unprecedented abundance in that encampment. After that the wrath of God fell on the rest of those men. Within a few days, their children died, their livestock was carried off by barbarians and their houses were plundered by thieves, so everyone understood that this had happened to them because of the saint's anger.

35. The blessed one went through all the desert with the brethren who sang without ceasing, and they came to the city of Solomon which is named in the Book of Kings, Palmyra, which he built in the desert. The citizens were Jews, and Christian in name only; they saw the host of brothers afar off, and as they approached they shut the city gates, saying to one other, 'Who can feed all these people? If we they come into our city, we shall all starve'. When the saint saw this, he glorified God, saying, 'It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in man' (*Ps.* 117:8). Take courage, brothers, for the Lord visits us whence we do not expect it'. The barbarians of those parts showed them exceptional charity. They had spent three days in the desert when, as the saint had said, God sent some camel-drivers who were four stations away from the city, all carrying food. They received it and, when they had given thanks to God, they also partook. There was so much left over that even when they had received it, they found themselves giving to the poor of the city out of what had been sent to them.

36. Out of sympathy for the host of brothers' earlier suffering, the most zealous among them wanted to give them a rest; and contrary to his will, they made various foods which they knew were agreeable to the brothers. Desiring to teach them that they were above the passions, he waited until they had everything carefully prepared and then suddenly, as was his wont, took up the parchments of the Holy Gospel and went on his way saying, 'Glory to God in the highest and earth peace, goodwill among men' (for it was his custom to do this when he wanted to move on), ordering them to touch nothing of what had been prepared. So they left everything that had been made, and went on their way.

37. After four days' journey they came to the place where his brother was, his mother's son; he was archimandrite of a large community. Alexander wanted to discover whether he walked according to the Gospel of the Lord. Taking just one brother, he knocked at the gate. As was customary, the gate-keeper said to him, 'Wait: let me tell the abbot, and then you can come in'. He did not wait, however, but followed the brother, wanting to find out whether the abbot would be moved to anger against the brother. But his holy brother Peter - for that was his name - seeing his true

brother after thirty years, recognised him at once. For our nature is such that even in uncertainty, we recognise our own. Falling at his feet, he clasped them, begging forgiveness for what had happened. But the blessed one reproved him rather severely, saying, 'Our father Abraham received strangers and served them himself; and this was what our Lord Jesus Christ decreed'. And shaking out his garments (cf. *Acts* 18:6), he went on his way. The most holy Peter, with all the brothers, besought him weeping to stay with them just one day, and he declined. But after teaching them of poverty and divine love, he set off for Antioch.

38. The bishop of the city, Theodotos, had been influenced by certain wicked and hypocritical people (i.e. his exarchs); and when he learnt that the blessed Alexander was entering the city with a host of monks singing unceasingly, he gave orders to drive them back harshly with curses and blows. Taking this as their authority, they mercilessly maltreated the servants of God and drove them away. The saint, seeing the armoury of the devil, secretly came into the city with the brothers around midnight and, finding an old bathhouse, had their unceasing hymnody take place as usual. When the bishop found out that they had taken this liberty he was very angry, but did not dare to attack them again. He was afraid of the people of the city because they saw and heard of the blessed man's glorious works and considered him as one of the prophets; so they would leave the church and wait for him, listening to his wonderful teachings.

39. Seeing that he could speak freely to everyone and that everyone listened to him gladly and was ready to do what he commanded, and that he enjoyed great glory and honour, Alexander found the opportune moment and set about caring for the poor of the city. Here too one can wonder at the saint's magnanimity in that this man, hounded from place to place and with absolutely no possessions, saw to it by his zeal that there was even a hostel built. He gathered together the rich men of the city, admonished them according to the godly wisdom that was in him and prepared them to provide for the needs of the hostel. With great boldness, he took both the commander and the bishop to task for negligence on many matters. To put it simply, he was an instructor and teacher for all.

40. Seeing this and similar things every day, the clergy were admiring to his face, but inwardly they were consumed with resentment. A certain subdeacon named Malchos, a proud man, went to the bishop and said, 'I had just one resource, the revenue from the trials, and the monk Alexander took it away from me. And not only this, but also the glory of the church; and we have become the laughing-stock of everyone now that we have suddenly found an instructor. This is the trickster who stirred up the city

against our blessed father Porfyrios, and did him innumerable evils. This is the man who covered the faces of the heretics with soot. This is the man who is feared by bishops and rulers, and perhaps also by the demons. This same man is everywhere solitary. This is the man who despises death and creates trouble for everyone. Now he has come here and is doing the same thing. If this man stays in this city, there is nowhere for us to live, because we are now disgraced before everybody. But I pray your angel that I may be authorised to drive him out of the city'.

41. When Malchos had received authority against him, he went to the blessed man with a crowd of litter-bearers and, seized with unbridled rage, at once struck him, saying, 'Get out of this city, you evil-doer!'. The blessed one, like an innocent lamb, did not respond, but meekly bore this outrage, saying only, 'And that servant's name was Malchos' (*Jn.* 18:10). Hearing the readiness of his words, the bystanders wondered at the man's wisdom. Many people gathered against him but could not harm the blessed man, because the people claimed him; and they reported this to the bishop. When they had consulted together, they went to the commander and begged him for one favour: to exile the saint to the city of Chalcis in Syria, and to expel from the city the brothers who were with him. God who loves mankind used their wickedness to a good end, for the blessed one, leaving Syria in accordance with God's economy, would visit his spiritual children after twenty years. When this happened, he went into the city and strengthened everyone in their faith. He spent some time there and was guarded by the public watch because of the rulers' fear, and by the citizens because of their love for him. Knowing the contrivances of the wicked, he marvelled at God's long-suffering and at how their intentions had been thwarted.

42. After some time, he decided to set off again for foreign parts and to bid farewell, as he had done six times. Being unable to leave openly because of the orders of the commander, he changed his clothes and dressed as a beggar, and went out at night. After journeying for many days he came to a certain place where he found a monastery of distinguished men of piety called 'the Krithinion', and he went in. He greeted everyone, and was amazed to see the rule and order of their life and the great love of the holy brothers. Considering this, he said to himself, 'I know this rule of life, and I recognise this order as my own original one. But I am amazed how they should have been disseminated in these parts. I have travelled all this way, and have seen nothing like it. Yet the faces of those who keep this rule are unfamiliar'. As he pondered these things, he found out who had set up the monastery in those parts, and realised that he was one of his own flock: and he glorified God who had shown forth even in those parts the fruits of his

labours. Content with their love and their zeal, he went out again to seek those ensnared by the devil. Seeing the blessed man asking about everything in detail, and pointing to the distraction of the garden as a possible impediment to perfect virtue, the holy brothers were moved to compunction by the Holy Spirit and recognised that this was indeed Alexander, the great shepherd of reason-endowed sheep who shone forth in the east.

43. When he went away, twenty-four of the brothers followed him as soldiers of Christ, bearing the breast-plate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, and asking that through him they might be brought blameless to Christ. Seeing the brothers' great eagerness and their zeal and their faith and pondering what this might be, the blessed one understood through the Holy Spirit that he was called to a contest in those parts. He was renewed in mind as he prepared himself, and prayed to Christ that His will might be done in him as soon as possible. God who loves mankind was swift to hear his prayer. While he stayed near the house of the holy martyr Menas, there gathered around him noble athletes of Christ from all the local monasteries, men healthy in mind, belonging to three races: Romans, Greeks and Syrians, three hundred in all. He divided them into six choirs to perform unceasing hymnody. He taught them all poverty, and ordered everything according to his original rule. Within a few days he showed his monks to be adorned with every virtue, and taught them the fundamentals of their struggle. He set people in charge of companies of fifty and ten, according to the rule; and at every hour they persevered in singing in praise of God.

44. The common people of the city saw the ascetic struggle that had been started, the unceasing hymnody, the complete poverty and the glorious mysteries which were accomplished with many wonders; and they came to him readily, truly as to a benefactor and a teacher, and were taught by him about the hope and life to come. In a short time, he became a haven of salvation and an instructor of righteousness for all. And if he was silent, his life cried aloud and constantly reproved those who perverted the commandments. If they still failed to mend their ways, he used the freedom of speech which he had to rebuke them. Indeed, people saw their great poverty and exactitude, and that they had no possessions except for the parchments on which they had the Holy Scriptures, and that they were constantly performing their hymnody, and living in the body as if bodiless; and in amazement they glorified God who had shown forth even in those parts His glorious mysteries. For, as I have said before, they disdained the things of earth and took care for nothing in this present life.

45. Certain unbelieving men tried to test the grace of God, and they

stayed with the brothers night and day, wanting to see where the servants of God got their food from. For they saw that the day's food was found ready without fail, and the brothers took what they needed and what was left over was given to the poor, and no thought was given for the morrow. The blessed one knew in the Spirit what they were thinking, and he said to his attendant monk, when there was no one knocking at the door, 'Go out and receive what has been sent by the Master'. Before he got near the door, a man dressed in white came and knocked hard. When the brother opened the door, he found a basket brimming with pure, warm bread, but could not see the man who had knocked. For it was an angel of God who had produced the man with the loaves and then gone away. So the brother asked the man who had come, 'Who sent you here?' He replied, 'I was taking the loaves out of the oven and a very large man dressed in white appeared before me and put terrible pressure on me, saying, 'Take all the loaves to the servants of the Most High'. And as I did not know the place, he made me follow him as far as here. He was the man who knocked at the door, and now he has disappeared'. When the brother heard this, he made it known to the blessed abbot. The brothers were already seated at their tables, and the holy Alexander took the warm bread and set it before them; and they partook with thankfulness, and gave the remains to their brothers the poor. And they were amazed at the man's great boldness because, in accordance with Scripture, he had no care for the morrow. Wanting to confirm the brothers in their faith, he called the visitor into their midst and made them hear everything from his own mouth. Thus the souls of the brothers were bound to him with fear and love. And he did not do this from a desire to glorify himself; but because they were going to embark on a struggle, he trained them first and confirmed their souls in faith, lest they should come into the middle of the arena and faint through lack of faith.

46. I shall relate a few of the many miracles which were made manifest to many people; for by this I want to show that this noble athlete really became a second Moses, faithful to God in all his house. The blessed one was in the habit of sending the younger monks out on monastery business. It happened, then, that one of them fell into promiscuity in the city, using the resources provided by God the Master on the brothers' account. Knowing this in the Spirit, the blessed one went to meet him and reproached him in a cryptic fashion, saying to him just one word in the local language: 'Thief!' And he fell silent, wanting to see whether through this word he would turn to repentance and confess his sin. This was why he did not investigate the matter - lest the enemy of truth should destroy him through shame. But the brother did not clearly understand that the father knew his

sin, but took his word as a joke and went on with what he was doing. The holy shepherd was mourning over him and beseeching God. And wanting to show him that he knew all about his previous sin, he took a reasonable pretext and punished him, banishing him from his sight. Again Satan hardened his heart, and he did not want to make amends. After three days he was touched with compunction and blamed himself, and decided to plead against his punishment. As the brother was thinking this to himself, the blessed one immediately knew it by the Spirit, and said to his attendant monk, 'Go and say to the brother: "Since your heart is softened and you have repented, you are released from punishment"'. When the brother heard this, he knew truly from the second sign that Alexander had been well aware of the first case too, and in tears he admitted to the first sin also. After that the brother was saved, following in the footsteps of his teacher.

47. I want to relate another sign surpassing human nature. The blessed one provided for the making of a mixed potion for the brothers who were sick. They had earthenware pots, and he had these fixed in place and water heated in them. He detailed four brothers who took it in turns each day to see to this. One day, however, an oversight occurred; or rather, the Lord permitted an oversight to occur in order that his servant might be made manifest to all. On that day no one had seen to it; they had simply washed out the jars and filled them with cold water in the morning, and left them. When the time had come and they remembered because the water was needed for use, they were too ashamed even to look at one of the brothers, and did not dare go and tell the abbot. But one of them plucked up his courage and went to him and said, 'We have no wood, and we have not heated the water'. When the blessed one heard this, he said, 'Why did you not mention this in the morning? But I know that you want to test me. Go; you have your hot water'. Doubtful, they went in, and found the jars boiling. And on that day no fire had been put under them. At this, the brothers marvelled once again at the faith of the man. We have shown these things in part so that from these few examples we may give assurance of many, and [of the fact] that all things were possible for him because he was perfect in faith.

48. His ministry was well performed, with God's help; his disciples were growing in faith and they rejoiced in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and lived in peace: but the enemy could not bear to see this, and came against the noble athlete like a hostile array. For they start by firing arrows at each other while they are still far off. Then with one accord they rush on each other with swords, and victory goes to the side which prevails. This was what the enemy of truth did. For fifty years he made war on this brave man

and was unable to put him to confusion, but always brought war down upon his own head. And now, at last, he was coming against him with all his demonic host, and calling the ranks of men into alliance with him, and again he fired a shaft against the servant of God. Then it was reported to the prefects that the monk Alexander was a heretic and wanted to destroy the Church of God. The blessed one held out bravely through prayers; as the saying goes, they could not resist even his shadow. For it is in the nature of falsehood to be overpowered by truth. Yet if I must speak the truth where there is uncertainty, justice was rocked by storms. The blessed Alexander appeared, outwardly unarmed yet adorned with prudence, with the mass of the people stirred up against him by the devil. But the servant of God applied to himself the words of the Holy Scriptures: 'Even though princes sit plotting against me, Thy servant will meditate on Thy statutes. Thy testimonies are my delight, they are my counsellors. I cleave to Thy testimonies, O Lord; let me not be put to shame!' (*Ps.* 118: 23-24, 31).

49. Then the enemy of truth stood before him and cried out, 'Why do you punish me before my time, servant of God? I have my own Master and Judge'. So the appointed judges, failing to reach a just verdict, justified him before the great Judge. They did this so that once he was dismissed, he would be lynched by the people and the defenders of the devil. But trusting in God's protection, he made his way through the midst of them. For the awe of the Lord fell upon them, and their resolve crumbled. The holy brothers were praying to God for him, and the same thing happened here as happened with the holy apostles. For in both cases, God was working with them.

50. Once this war had abated by the power of Christ, the enemy of truth did not rest, but did everything and devised every scheme to put a stop to the ceaseless hymnody, because it was directed against him. So he devised a way that he would be able to destroy it at last, so he thought. Knowing that countries and cities are often betrayed by their own people, he therefore attacked the blessed one in this way, and called his compatriots into an alliance, to carry them along with him. And they seized the blessed Alexander with his holy brothers and bound them, and inflicted deadly wounds upon them. Then they did stop their ceaseless hymnody for a few days, and truly there was mourning among the brothers and among the holy Powers. For the former shepherds of those same brothers were ordered each to take back his own monks.

51. The servant of God Alexander was sent away alone, so they thought: but he was not alone, because he had Christ with him. Once he had been sent away, the brothers all gathered together with one accord as if at a trumpet

call. And the service of God and the same rule was re-established the same day, as if nothing had happened to the monks - such was their disposition. Or rather, they rejoiced as if they had found a spiritual treasure. They made progress in the Lord, and many other brothers joined them. If one wished to travel the whole world under heaven and not just the land of the Romans, but also the barbarian lands, one would find disciples of this blessed man thriving. For they themselves then set up a distinguished monastery of 'sleepless ones', and many other large monasteries. For these monasteries were manifest to everyone, like the sun in the sky.

52. If we wanted to detail any further the virtues of this noble athlete, then, as the blessed Apostle Paul said, 'Time would fail me to tell'. What man could there be so great, and vouchsafed such inspiration, that he could recount the struggles of fifty years? To the unbelievers and enemies of good, because they are wholly carnal, even I shall perhaps seem to be talking about things that are impossible, exaggerated and surpassing human nature. But the faithful who are of one mind with us, those who consider their neighbours' good as their own, will accept that we speak the truth, convinced of what the Lord promised, that 'you will also do the works that I do, and greater works than these shall you do' (cf. *Jn.* 14:12) - when the disciples were amazed at the withering of the fig tree (*Mk.* 20:24) - and again, 'all things are possible to him who believes' (*Mk.* 9:23). For we know that right living is the supreme sign, and that this perfect teacher had attained that; so let us end our tale with the end of his life. This blessed man lived the ascetic life for fifty years and was constantly afflicted, persecuted, naked, thirsty and hungry, and rejoiced in this, boldly teaching the word of truth and gathering many people to offer to Christ, as his disciples also do to this day. As he shone forth in these ways, his end came bringing him rest from his labours, blessed and free from care. He fell asleep in holiness and was buried in the region of Bithynia, in a place called Gomon.

53. After he departed this life, by his intercessions his disciples multiplied and gained in distinction, as he had said, not only in those parts but throughout creation. Those who had led their community established a monastery, as we have said, worthy of his way of life, and called 'of the *akoimetoi*' because of their unceasing and ever-wakeful praise; and they translated his holy and blessed relics. So that God who loves mankind might show here also that He glorifies those who glorify Him and that the blessed one's action were in accordance with God's will, his holy relics performed miracles daily. Unclean spirits could not endure even to hear his name, but were burned as if by fire when they heard it.

54. Out of love and care for our brothers, we [have related] what we saw

in our own unskilled fashion, mindful only of truth. We hope in the Lord that others, moved by the Holy Spirit and better versed in these things than we, will tell the story more clearly, for the edification and benefit of those who want to partake in this way of life. May we all become worthy of being his disciples and attain, by his intercessions, those things of which he has become a partaker, by the grace and goodwill of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory to the ages of ages, amen.